**"Worries about ..."objectivity" are characteristic of a secularized culture in which the scientist replaces the priest. The scientist is now seen as the person who keeps humanity in touch with something beyond itself."**

Scientific intervention, you say?

From the ermine mantles to clerical robes and most recently the scientist’s lab coat, it would almost seem as if we humans have a fairly unbroken tradition of listening attentively to any authority with a stylish white outfit. And as philosopher Richard Rorty argues in *Objectivism, Relativism and Truth*, our conceptual umbilical chord with the past might not – for many things – be as secularly severed as we may like to think it is. In a time where scientific expertise is almost synonymous with *credibility*, the proposal from Rorty thus opens for an interesting philosophical question. Does, or even *could*, the natural sciences provide some sort of substitute for the *existential* needs that religion now seems to have mostly lost its grip on? And, could it be possible that the scientific mantra of “objectivity” and empirical retraceability almost become overshadowing

No matter the situation, there is little point denying that we do live in a very different society here in Europe than we did just a few centuries ago. As far as the practical-political values that constitute our society go, there is no value in religious statements, and the freedom of religion is *really* just the freedom to have personal illusions. On may argue that “experts” in all fields have gradually gained the power to define our values and conceptions.

However, when Rorty states that science connects us with “something bigger than ourselves”, there is – I believe – a very crucial nuance to that picture that he fails to acknowledge. It is not that they are both majestic and beautiful: By all means, an exploding supernova can be as humbling and awe-inspiring as any of God’s hat tricks in the Old Testament, but there is something in their essences that has changed. In contrast to the religious world view of the past, the *scientific* “something” beyond ourselves is in its very essence *indifferent* to us. The universe post-industrial revolution works perfectly well without humanity, and natural science – in its most ideal form – has confirmed this by discovering its self-governing set of mathematical premises. And it cannot be another way, because the scientific principle of A *why* confers a kind of intrinsic subjectivity onto the universe, which it; from the “objective” – or at least empirical – position of natural science, it cannot have. When a kid asks a physicist “why is the sky blue”, the physicist ensuing lecture of electromagnetic wave lengths and atmospheric light fracturing is *really* just a description of *how* the sky is blue, and in a way that is practically useful to us. “The sky is blue because Lord Vishnu finds it a pretty color”, would in contrast be an answer to the “why”. It will not help us understand the sky further, but may ease the soul. The point is, that scientific truth and religious and moral-philosophical truth have, in their essences, fundamentally different *tasks*, fulfilling different needs. And while science has proven effective at defeating the “magical” how-explanations that religion *also* used to give, it has few preconditions to overlap the other way. Electrons, no matter how much they make TVs work, are hard to make the basis of poetic parables of morality that offers personal consolation. The triumph of the scientific method is that it produces retraceable and usable descriptions of the world; that it, to put it simply, just *works*. And that is that – a fact that might be both liberating and a bit apprehensive in its finite-ness.

Everything seems, however, to suggest that we still have basic need as humans to project an importance onto our universe just as much as before, and – here is where Richard Rory’s argument falls a bit short for the second time – all the historical evidence point towards science in itself not being enough. For instance, how would he explain the rising philosophical star of existentialism in the 19th and 20th centuries – which main problem was exactly that of dealing with the modern, existential dread over our perceived indifference of the universe – if not by that it filled a new existential need that *wasn’t there* earlier? As I see it, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus wouldn’t just have been burned at the stake for heresy in 13th century Europe, their services would probably also have been uncalled for. And I find it hard to see, for instance how the “dealing-with-meaninglessness-101-handbook” that Camus’ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* essentially is, would make any sense in a Universe where we *didn’t* see ourselves as the only purpose-infusing force in existence. Of course, one might argue that the universe was just as meaningless (or –ful) 800 years ago as it is today, and human beings just as prone to existential anguish – as Kierkegaard would have put it – so that any religious belief at any time is just as much a protest against the loneliness of existence as it is now. But I suspect, however, that an how different we think today

On the other end of the scale, as touched upon in my introduction, many argue that the modern criticism of religion today – or at least the scientific “debunking” of religious myths has, in fact, acquired quite a zealous tinge itself. However, I suspect that this might be a tinge which more than anything stems from the inescapable human habit of projecting a higher purpose unto everything we to, as previously mentioned. And to put a specific *usage* of science as an end in itself in the long run is, I suspect, easier said than done. And, again, the fact that we “had to” develop philosophical disciplines such as existentialism speak out against it. It is also important to note that scientific objectivism can never be “ideally” philosophically objective, as it is always colored by our human nature. For instance; we always tend towards finding the simplest and most harmonious mathematical equations in physics, just because they are the most pleasing to us.

All in all, I think all philosophy boils down to a question of finding a healthy perspective. And I, for one, think it is not *completely impossible* either to derive some philosophical beauty from how the universe works either. For instance, the thought that we are all (verifiably) stardust, cannot that be a bit poetic? And even though scientific empirism is neither completely objective, nor in equal esteem with other perspectives in society, there is no point denying that still, in a philosophic sense, the scientific project has as its chief idea to find what is *common* *ground* and *absolute* in the world more than any other devices in our history of ideas. And – to take the Camus approach – might not that be as noble and fulfilling a way to push our Sisyphus stone than any other? To find something deep down shared between us all, and stand together against that god-damn soulless yet emancipating thing we call existence in modernity.